

**FIT TO A "T"**  
**Luke 2:8-20**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Don't you hate it when you get clothing for Christmas but it doesn't fit? I certainly do. I don't want to ask the person who gave me the present to now give me a receipt so I can take it back. It's embarrassing because now that person is going to know that I found out what they paid for the item. I also hate to exchange gifts or get refunds. In fact, most of the time I'll keep something that doesn't fit rather than make the exchange.

I think the reason I feel this way is because I know that the fault is not really in the gift. There isn't a problem with the gift; the problem is with me. The misfit is not because the gift doesn't fit me: I don't fit the gift. I'm the misfit.

Does it surprise you to know that some people don't think they fit God's gift? Some people think they are unworthy of God's gift of His son. Well, tucked within the story of the birth of Jesus is some really good news: you fit God's gift...and he fits you...to a "T". My proof of that is the shepherds. On the first Christmas night, there were shepherds on the hillside who fit God's gift to a "T".

**I. The Shepherds Were Fit to Tell (Luke 2:10)**

*<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

If you were at our community Christmas service last Sunday evening, you will have heard Chris Horton, pastor at the Zif Missionary Baptist Church, explain that the shepherds were outcasts in the world at the time that Jesus was born. In Jesus' culture, people regarded shepherds as uncouth, unclean and unworthy of polite company.

They lived in the field and slept outside. Do you know that "outside smell" that kids have when they come in from playing? Well, the shepherds smelled like that all the time. They did not have the benefit of showers and tubs and bubble baths. They smelled like the great outdoors and they looked filthy.

They could not go to the temple each week to worship. They could not offer the sacrifices for forgiveness of their sins. So they were not only thought of as dirty, they were regarded as ceremonially unclean, too.

They were also regarded as ignorant. Most of them grew up tending sheep in their childhood and youth so they did not have the benefit of classroom education. Usually they could not read or write.

Most shepherds were also poor. They were field workers without the comfort of indoor shelter or a permanent place to lay their heads. They had nothing. Most often, they didn't even own the sheep they were tending: they were just hired hands.

Shepherds had the reputation in those days of being liars and thieves. They were not welcome in the local synagogue or in the Temple in Jerusalem. In court their testimony was considered worthless. I mean, after all, who would believe a shepherd?

Isn't it odd? Of all the people within walking distance of Bethlehem, God invited the shepherds to be first to worship Jesus. He sent them a chorus of angels that rivals any heaven-come-to-earth account in the Bible. This says something about the kind of people to whom God gave the gift of His son: He gave Jesus to people who didn't seem to fit the gift...people whom the gift didn't seem to fit.

The shepherds were poor. They were field laborers who didn't sleep in houses. The angels could have come to shopkeepers or merchants, but they didn't. They passed up people of sufficient resources.

The shepherds were social and political nobodies. It's unlikely they had access to polite society or governmental debate. God's message could have come to the king, just a few miles away in Jerusalem. Instead, God's message skipped people of any influence at all and came to shepherds...to people who thought they were not fit to receive God's wonderful gift.

Each Christmas, we set shepherds in our nativity sets. They are financial, educational, and social outsiders. Add an unwed mother and her husband-to-be, and we get a pretty motley crew of characters. If these displays teach us anything, it is that Jesus' birth upsets all we've known about to whom God's gift is given. This is one of the wonders of Christmas.

What a wonder that the good news of great joy came to a bunch of nobodies on a hillside. What a wonder that they were a perfect fit for God's gift...and that His gift was a perfect fit for them.

Whoever you are, you are a perfect fit for God's gift...and He is a perfect fit for you. You are fit to tell: you are fit to be told the Gospel and to hear it, comprehend it and accept it.

## II. The Shepherds Were Fit to Tell (Luke 2:17)

Not only were these shepherds fit to tell the Gospel to, they were fit to tell the Gospel to others. Luke 2:15-19 says:

<sup>15</sup> *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

<sup>16</sup> *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

Did you catch what just happened? These uneducated, unpretentious, unacceptable and unimpressive men became the first evangelists. When God needed heralds to announce the arrival of Jesus, He chose them. The largest gathering of angels ever seen from planet Earth brought an announcement for them. They proclaimed a peace, which would now be available to all people, even those outside the camp. The irony is not lost: those the world regarded as liars became God's star witnesses.

The shepherds raced to see the baby and then, without instruction, told everyone who would listen what they had heard and what they had seen. You might ask, "Who on earth would believe a shepherd?" Yet the Bible says, "All who heard the shepherd's story were astonished."

"Astonished?" No doubt! Astonished because a virgin got pregnant. Astonished because shepherds saw angels and received their announcement. Astonished because they followed their instructions and saw a baby born in a barn and sleeping in a hay manger. All who heard were especially astonished because all of this was the setting within which God came to our planet disguised as a newborn. This newborn was going to bring salvation to God's people.

"Astonished?" Sure! And on top of all that, the first human heralds of God's good news to the world were...a bunch of stinking shepherds.

You know, sometimes the most effective messengers are the least likely. Often it is the unpretentious, the unassuming, the plain and simple down

to earth people who do the best job of telling others about Jesus. They don't try to make a slick presentation, or a flashy performance, or a flawless production. They just tell the truth about Jesus.

Shepherds weren't allowed to give testimony in court, but God used shepherds to be the first humans to testify that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. The message of the Gospel fit these men to a "T"...and they fit the message because they were very, very ordinary.

### III. The Shepherds Were Fit to Tell (Luke 2:20)

The shepherds were fit to tell the Gospel to, they were fit to tell the Gospel to others and they were fit to tell God how great He is and how great His grace is. Luke 2:19-20 says:

*<sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

These shepherds went back to their fields and went back to their sheep but they went back praising God because of His great gift to the world. The world considered them undeserving but God regarded them as worthy to worship Him.

The last verse of our text says that the shepherds, who had seen such wondrous sights, had to go back to the ordinary. That is true for us each year. The celebration of Christmas is a special time, but when the fun and festivities are over, we have to return to our jobs and our responsibilities. But the shepherds returned so full of what had happened in their lives that they could not keep themselves from praising God and glorifying His name.

Let's remember who these shepherds were: they were crude, and tough, and you probably wouldn't want your sister to date one. The celebrating that these shepherds were doing was probably not the artistic praise spoken by the cultured, nor the quiet reflection of the scholar. When the Bible says that they were "glorifying and praising God," it is perhaps describing whooping and hollering. It is likely that is the only kind of praising and glorifying they knew...and I suspect it brought a smile to God's face.

Through faith, the shepherds believed the message that God sent them. They went to see the baby. After finding Jesus, they told the good news—the Gospel—to others as they "glorified and praised God." They returned to their duties as shepherds, but they were changed men since they continued to praise God even while they went back to the same jobs.

**CONCLUSION:**

Here is what you must know: no matter who you are and no matter what you've done, God considers you worthy to be told about Jesus, worthy to tell others about him and worthy to worship God because of him.

Have you heard about William Studwell? Studwell died in early August of this year. He had been a professor at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb and had, as a hobby, researched the history of Christmas carols. Studwell published 35 books during his lifetime and one more unfinished work on Christmas carols is being published posthumously.

Studwell named the song "Go Tell IT On The Mountain" as his pick for Carol of the Year for 2004. His research led him to believe it was written by Frederick Jerome Work (1880-1942), an African-American composer, teacher and scholar. "I looked through hundreds of carol collections and other song books and I could not find it in any collection prior to the 1950s," says Studwell. "About that time the song steadily began to gain in popularity, winning over listeners with its energetic beat and its enthusiastic call to action."

Well, that's the point: this carol is a call to action. If a bunch of uneducated, unpretentious, unacceptable and unimpressive shepherds could be effective messengers of the Gospel, you can, too. This song is a call to action to go tell everyone that Jesus Christ is born.

**INVITATION:**        *#258 – "Go, Tell It On The Mountain"*